

# **THE IMAGE OF EASTERN EUROPE IN POSTMEMORY DISCOURSE**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis constitutes an interdisciplinary analysis of Holocaust trauma representation. The work researches historical changes in Eastern Europe of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. This period is characterized by a critical change in the treatment of memory about Holocaust and Jewish cultural heritage by Eastern Europeans. The thesis treats literary works of the generation of postmemory as unique testimonies of long-lasting effect of the Holocaust and as a useful lens through which one can look at the perception of historical events and personal experience of trauma through the perspectives of remembering, travel and writing (trauma representation). This research argues that with time the memory of Eastern Europe comes to be contested by Jews, Eastern Europeans and West, meaning general public. The changes in the memory treatment are brought by the change of the ruling power: from total indifference under the Soviets to close attention after them. For the descendents of Holocaust survivors, a notion of root tour becomes closely connected to the idea of filling the gaps left by silencing.

This study resulted in a number of findings. Among them is a message of Holocaust postmemory literature to write a common history of Jews and Eastern Europeans. Another one is that the gap in the memory of Holocaust survivors' descendants is believed to be filled directly with the experience of the Eastern European homeland of their family.

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## Introduction

This thesis is devoted to the historical changes in Eastern Europe and their impact on Holocaust memory through the lens of literary works from the years 1986-2013. This period is characterized by a critical change of the treatment of memory about Holocaust and Jewish cultural heritage by Eastern Europeans. The timespan of the research is chosen according to the four works that were chosen as primary sources. The first novel, David Grossman's *See Under: Love* issued in Hebrew in 1986, was one of the first literary works of the second generation Holocaust "postmemory"<sup>1</sup> and it is still considered canonical. This literary work is particularly interesting from the historical point of view, since it was issued at a time when the communist regime in Eastern Europe prevented travelling there from non-communist countries, which is why the Israeli novelist presents an imaginary Poland, full of stereotypes and shaped by nostalgia. This work illustrates the first stage of the root trip to Eastern Europe by Holocaust descendants: imaginary. The following stage is presented by the book *Shtetl* written by Eva Hoffman in 1997 (a polemic response to a documentary of the previous year of the same name by Marian Marzynski). This is the period after the fall of the Berlin Wall, when the interest in Eastern Europe is growing; and the generation of postmemory first gets a chance to physically visit the homeland of their parents. The heritage tourism is born. The next work provides a look at the shift in generations. *Everything is Illuminated* is issued in 2002 by Jonathan S. Foer, a representative of the third generation of Holocaust survivors. The heritage tourism being at its peak, it is a lucrative business for the Ukrainian gentiles, who are more interested in earning money than in learning about the history of their homeland. The last work I am referring to is Rutu

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<sup>1</sup> "Postmemory describes the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right." Marianne Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory" *Poetics Today* 29:1, No. 1 (Spring 2008): 103.

Modan's graphic novel *The Property* that came out in 2013. From an Israeli perspective, it shows the absurdist obsession of Eastern Europeans with Holocaust memory.

While the selected literary works represent different periods of the relation to Holocaust memory, all of them illustrate its continuous difficulty of representation. The choice of sources is determined by the idea to illustrate not only different generations of postmemory, but also different genres and gender approaches. The researched source texts also give an understanding of perspectives of authors citizens of three countries: Grossman and Modan are Israelis, Foer is American, Hoffman and Marzynski are both Poles who emigrated to the USA). The plot of the texts takes place in Poland and Ukraine.

This study is taking a historical perspective when looking at literary works. This indirect treatment of history may produce distortions as well as new perspectives on the events. This thesis argues that literary works can reflect on historical events giving an intimate perspective combined with personal experience of trauma through the perspectives of remembering, travel and writing (trauma representation). The structure of the thesis is the following: an introduction, three chapters, and a conclusion. The first chapter touches upon a theoretical framework of trauma studies, explaining the case of the generation of postmemory, and deals with the representation of trauma in primary sources, which is historically unique due to the lack of documentary testimonies of Holocaust descendants. The second chapter gives a historical background to the period of appearance of postmemory art works and deals with the spatial dimension of trauma representation, answering the question why post-communist Eastern Europe as experienced in root trips become the imaginary framework of postmemory literary representation. The last chapter is devoted to the changes that a particular historical situation evokes in art, particularly, literary fiction. It analyses the historical evolution of genres of postmemory fiction, and

discusses the peculiarities of the representation of historical events on the linguistic level with the help of defamiliarization and labored reading<sup>2</sup>.

The present work represents a complex interdisciplinary study combining history with such fields of knowledge as memory studies and literary studies. This thesis will provide an insight into the social consequences of the historical events reflected in the different media representing the image of memory of the Holocaust and its effects. This presents an important contribution to postmemory studies on the interdisciplinary level.

### *Context*

The effects of the Holocaust are still visible: although as time passes the number of survivors is reduced, the intergenerational trauma remains a burden of their descendants, the generation of postmemory. Although none of them experienced the atrocities directly they inherit the trauma. For a long period the children of the Holocaust survivors experienced silencing, blocking the access to traumatic past of their parents. On the one hand, the people who came through the hell of concentration camps were reluctant to talk about the past, bringing it to life again. On the other hand, the Iron Curtain prevented access to information about the events that happened on the territory of Eastern Europe and some states under the Communist regime in Central Europe. After the fall of communism this region drew the interest of many Holocaust descendants as a travel destination. They were hoping to find the answers for their questions there: how their family lived, who were their neighbors and why all this happened. At first they could visit it only in their imagination, but the fall of the Iron Curtain gave young Jews from the USA and Israel an opportunity for mass travelling to the homeland of their parents and grandparents. History holds evidence of that time in documentaries, novels and essays, which tell an intimate story of an individual trauma.

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<sup>2</sup> Defamiliarization is an artistic tool, brought out by Viktor Shklovsky, aimed at representing a familiar concept in unfamiliar way. It is used for creating a new perspective on a trivial object. Often it is connected with making the text harder to read (labored reading), thus concentrating the reader's attention on a particular problem. See Viktor Shklovsky, *Viktor Shklovsky: A Reader*, trans. Alexandra Berlina, (Bloomsbury, 2017).

The pictures of Eastern European homeland during the Cold War and after it changed greatly because of the opening of free travel to these places from the Western World and free access to the information upon its war years. Different media reflected the rise of interest moving eastwards in search for understanding of one's roots. Eastern Europe played a dubious role in that time: for some people it became a nostalgic destination of a forgotten prewar paradise, for the others an image of the Holocaust itself as inferno was projected on it. The lacuna in family history firstly filled in by the generation of postmemory's imagination was to be filled by the witnesses' words and landscapes of the birthplaces of their parents and grandparents. That shift developed a new approach to writing family history. The peculiarities of writing about the intimacy of the world's tragedy on a personal level gave birth to the development and overlapping of different genres, as no previous category was suited for the depiction of the catastrophe of such scale. A genre creates a vision of the world – from academic work to a novel through a family report. The trouble of representation of the lacuna and trauma is transmitted not only on the narrative but also on the speech level transforming reality into a rough language. Incomprehension is never overcome as knowledge remains fragmented, similar to the ruptured trauma narrative.

### *Methodology*

Comparative analysis allows to study the reformations of the genre considering the specificity of the reflection of the trauma and historical subjects. Close reading is used to trace the alteration of narratives caused by the peculiarities of trauma literature. This approach is very useful for the entanglement of complex postmodern narratives like *Everything is Illuminated* by J. S. Foer and *See Under: Love* by D. Grossman. Interdisciplinary research helps with broadening the perspective and enriching the research tools including both historiographical and literary ones.



Using Marianne Hirsch's conception of postmemory<sup>3</sup> and Maurice Halbwachs's collective memory studies<sup>4</sup>, an extensive analysis of two novels (*Everything is Illuminated* by J. S. Foer, *See under Love* by D. Grossman), a historical essay (*Shtetl: the life and death of a small town and the world of Polish Jews* by E. Hoffman), a graphic novel (*The Property* by R. Modan) and a documentary film (*Shtetl* by M. Marzynsky) representing fundamental concepts of two generations of Holocaust descendants will be carried out. Alison Landsberg's theory of prosthetic memory<sup>5</sup> gives an idea of traumatic memory, while Sara Horowitz's studies<sup>6</sup> are a source of knowledge about trauma representation in literary works.

The basis will be taken from Victor Sklovsky's concept of defamiliarization and labored reading<sup>7</sup> as tools for creating a new perspective. Edward Soja's theory of real-and-imagined space<sup>8</sup> combined with Michel Foucault's concepts of heterotopia and heterotemporality<sup>9</sup> provide a methodological apparatus to analyze spatial relationship between the real landscape and the literary, and memorial ones. Pierre Nora and his idea of *lieux de mémoire*<sup>10</sup> helps with the understanding of reasons for the generation of postmemory to take a root tour.

### *Hypothesis*

This study argues that the perception of the Jewish past by Eastern Europeans evolves with time and change of the political regime in this region: from total indifference

<sup>3</sup> Marianne Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory," *Poetics Today* 29, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 103.

<sup>4</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 51.

<sup>5</sup> Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory : The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*, (Columbia University Press, 2004).

<sup>6</sup> Sara R. Horowitz, *Voicing the Void: Muteness and Memory in Holocaust Fiction* (State University of New York Press, 1997).

<sup>7</sup> Viktor Shklovsky, *Viktor Shklovsky: A Reader*, trans. Alexandra Berlina, (Bloomsbury, 2017), 16.

<sup>8</sup> Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journey to Los Angeles and Other Real-And-Imagined Places*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996).

<sup>9</sup> Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias", *Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité*, trans. Jay Miskowiec (October, 1984), 1-9.

<sup>10</sup> Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire", *Representations*, No. 26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter-Memory (Spring, 1989): 7-24.

to close attention. Post-communist Europe became an object of literary portrayal by the generation of postmemory writers as they saw a root tour there as a way of filling a gap in knowledge left by long silencing.

## Chapter 1

### The Generation of Postmemory: Trauma

In the first research chapter I address the topic of trauma. This chapter intends to provide a theoretical framework of trauma representation and to analyze some of its examples taken from fictional works of the generation of postmemory. Here I argue that the concepts of prosthetic memory and *lieux de memoire* prove to be quite fruitful for analyzing literary testimonies of the descendants of Holocaust survivors. Another crucial point here is that silencing and heterotemporality are recurrent embodiments of trauma depiction. At first, I will look at the theoretical side of traumatic memory. My goal here is to clear the peculiarities of the generation of postmemory trauma representation from the theoretical point of view. After that I will give examples of the representation of memory of Holocaust and World War II becoming a part of the worlding process of the literary characters. Then I would like to show how silencing as a side of trauma is portrayed in literary sources. And finally I will look at heterotemporality as another tool of trauma representation.

#### 1.1.Theoretical Framework

Firstly, I explore a number of peculiarities of the generation of postmemory trauma representation from theoretical point of view. One of the most important researchers in the field is Ruth Leys with her comprehensive study *Trauma: A Genealogy*. In this book she pays close attention to the psychological side of trauma, reviewing Sigmund Freud's conclusions and his role in the works of today's researchers. The other component of Ruth Leys' study is how literary theory analyses trauma. It is important to mention that the scope of Leys' book is quite wide and includes examples of different traumatic events. Luckily for this research, Holocaust trauma has an important place in this study and it is mostly connected with Cathy Caruth and her works on postmemory. Leys' choice of this topic is based on a simple and clear argument: "there is the absolute indispensability of the concept

[trauma] for understanding the psychic harms associated with certain central experiences of the twentieth century, crucially the Holocaust...”.<sup>11</sup>

One of the key ideas of Leys is the close connection between PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) and memory. She argues that the narration must always be obstructed if possible. Her point is that there is no story about the experienced in the mind of the traumatized person, but just the event, that is lived through over and over, and at this pre-therapeutic stage reflection is rare and difficult:

“Post-traumatic stress disorder is fundamentally a disorder of memory. The idea is that, owing to the emotions of terror and surprise caused by certain events, the mind is split or dissociated: it is unable to register the wound to the psyche because the ordinary mechanisms of awareness and cognition are destroyed. As a result, the victim is unable to recollect and integrate the hurtful experience in normal consciousness; instead, she is haunted or possessed by intrusive traumatic memories. The experience of the trauma, fixed or frozen in time, refuses to be represented as past, but is perpetually reexperienced in a painful, dissociated, traumatic present.”<sup>12</sup>

In this way the memory of a traumatic event is not a coherent story, but a recurrent event, haunting the traumatized. The ideas of Ruth Leys are crucial for the implementation of a labored reading principle.

Due to the lack of information, representation of trauma and traumatic events in the descendants writing has to acquire some bits from the generally shared narrative. Thus, the elements of the collective representation come to be mixed with the individual experience. One of the good examples of this process, though not linked to trauma in this case, is provided by Foer. One part of *Everything is Illuminated* claims to reproduce parts of “The Book of Recurrent Dreams”, a manuscript that is written by the whole shtetl from its inception in 1791 until its destruction in 1942, it contains the dreams that any inhabitant saw at night. Such an intimate matter as dream is owned by the whole community. I consider it a parallel to the notion of **collective memory**. The concept of collective memory employs the existence of a group memory that lives beyond the person’s existence, and thus beyond

<sup>11</sup> Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 2.

<sup>12</sup> Leys, *Trauma*, 2.

an individual memory. According to Maurice Halbwachs, the construction of collective memory “obligates people not just to reproduce in thought previous events of their lives, but also to touch them up, to shorten them, or to complete them so that, however convinced we are that our memories are exact, we give them a prestige that reality did not possess.”<sup>13</sup> The collective memory affirms the individual’s belonging to a group. Patrick Christian emphasizes that “the allure of the sufferer to the object of trauma lies with the possibility of correcting the imbalance between the hidden story and that of the public record. It is the dissonance between the two records of memory – collective and the un-integrated individual – that creates the tension in the collective memory.”<sup>14</sup> One of the examples of collective memory is family memory, with the legacy of which I deal in this thesis. Family memory is located between the national memory and the individual one. Thus, it includes both of them. In case of Holocaust survivors’ families, the memory of the wartime constitutes a traumatic legacy of their descendants. It was a long-lasting effect of the Holocaust on several following generations. As Ruth Leys puts it: “From this [Caruth’s] perspective, if history is a symptom of trauma it is a symptom which must not, indeed cannot, be cured but simply transmitted, passed on.”<sup>15</sup> However, the transition of the trauma is not necessarily verbal, it can even be inherited on the psychological level, without any direct knowledge of the particular family experience. People who came through the hell of concentration camps were reluctant to talk about the past in this way bringing it back to life again. But of course the trauma was conducted not only verbally, and the non-verbal signs of the lived-through atrocities were noted by the descendants in their parents. All in all, the reasons for **silencing** were the lack of the language to represent the horrors and consequences of trauma and the

<sup>13</sup> Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 51.

<sup>14</sup> Patrick Christian, “History, Memory & Conflict: the collective memory of Maurice Halbwachs,” *Nova Southeastern Univeristy presentations on History, Memory, and Conflict, At Ft Lauderdale, Florida*, Volume: 1, no. 6. (2012): 6.

<sup>15</sup> Leys, *Trauma*, 269.

survivors' fear to transmit their sufferings to their children. The fact that in many cases the tragedy was silenced, did not stop the descendants from going on a quest for their family past.

In this way, with the change of generations an evolution of the attitude towards memory appeared. Jeffrey Alexander in his study of cultural trauma argues that different generations dealt with different layers of tragedy<sup>16</sup>. During the first generation the historians' attention was mostly paid to the victims, represented as depersonalized mass.. The next generation came after the Eichman trial and famous book by Hannah Arendt *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 1963, which was interested in the psychology of the perpetrators and introduced the concept of *banality of evil*. In the 1980s arrived the generation of postmemory, whose main question concerned identity touching both victims' and perpetrators' descendants. The second generation representatives' interest in family history was blocked by their parents' muteness and impossibility to reach out for the homeland of their family. For example, the fictional character Shlomo, the protagonist of *See Under: Love*, has to present his trip to Poland as a research project to the Socialist officials. Similarly both Marzynski and Hoffman, although visiting Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin wall, still find it useful to emphasize the journalistic nature of their interest in this area. Usually they filled the gaps of their family tradition with general knowledge from mass media and creative imagination. The third generation, which grew up with a profusion of information on the Holocaust, represents prosthetic memory, dealing with the problem of remembrance and preservation of mediated memory, as well as trivialization and commercialization of the Holocaust. This generation finally got access to the places and their grandparents reluctantly revealed fragments of their stories. Historical person J. S. Foer took one of the heritage trips himself. But the problem was that the Eastern European shtetls

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<sup>16</sup> Jeffrey C. Alexander, *Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma*. In C. Alexander, R. Eyerman, B. Giesen, N. J. Smelser, P. Sztompka (eds.) 2004, *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*. Ch. 1. University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 2004, pp. 1-30.

and communities did not exist anymore and the memory of elderly and traumatized people was distorted. The third generation filled the lacunas with the topoi of Holocaust representation from mass culture and testimonies of the survivors. It is quite interesting how Mica, the protagonist of *The Property*, states that her first trip to Eastern Europe in c. 2010 is everything but a root tour. Thus, the memory of the Holocaust evolved drastically from individual memory of the survivors to collective memory of their descendants in the USA and Israel, from personal to universalizable, from silencing to obsession.<sup>17</sup> The ironical representation of the obsession with memory can be found in J. S. Foer's *Everything is Illuminated* (Jonathan's obsession vs. Ukrainians' indifference) and in Rutu Modan's *The Property* (the president of the Society for Jewish Memorialization, young Pole guiding tours to Warsaw ghetto). However, the pattern changes with time: Jonathan pays for the trip to Eastern Europe in 1997, while Mica, the main character of Modan's novel, declares that she is not taking a root tour, but now it is Eastern Europeans who are obsessed with the heritage. Modan also brings an ironic element embodied by Jewish family friend Avram Yagodnic, who hunts for money, not for memory.

The journeys to the Eastern Europe were made by the survivors' descendants in the belief that the spatial experience can help with self-understanding. Here I want to add some words about the spatial dimension of memory, that is crucial for this thesis. One can recall Pierre Nora's famous notion of **lieux de mémoire**. I am mostly interested in the concept of places of memory, in a way that the place comes to be sacredly connected with the memory of the event that happened there. And in the imagination of the generation of postmemory the transition from space to time seems to be missing. The access to the space of Holocaust in Eastern Europe in imagination or by travelling there appears to be the direct path to

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<sup>17</sup> See Jeffrey C. Alexander, "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma," in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, ed. C. Alexander, R. Eyerman, B. Giesen, N. J. Smelser, P. Sztopka, Ch. 1. (University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 2004), 1-30.

memory itself and to all its missing, or repressed parts. In this way the places are hoped to complete one's own personal history.

The generation of postmemory did not experience the traumatic events directly, but still suffers from similar neurotic repetitions. One can see the speculation of obsessive repetition of a traumatic event in the case of descendants in Jeffrey Alexander's works<sup>18</sup>, who gives an overview of generations of Holocaust survivors, outlining the features particular to each three of them. As Ruth Leys summarizes Caruth's point of view: "the victim of trauma who cannot symbolize or represent the traumatic event or accident that caused her condition nevertheless obsessively "performs," reenacts, or reexperiences it in the form of flashbacks, dreams, and related symptoms."<sup>19</sup>

The key concept used in this thesis, starting from the title, is postmemory. This term is not limited only to the field of Holocaust studies. The concept of postmemory is applied to a wide range of trauma theory topics. The most prominent theoretician of this concept and its author is Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University Marianne Hirsch. She defines **postmemory** as "the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated."<sup>20</sup> She argues for the term saying that postmemory «is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection.»<sup>21</sup>

Postmemory and the issue of the approaches to its studies are very topical today. After analyzing the existing literature on this topic one can see that the field is full of

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<sup>18</sup> Jeffrey C. Alexander, "On the Social Construction of Moral Universals: The 'Holocaust' from War Time to Trauma Drama," *European Journal of Social Theory*, no. 5 (1) (2002): 34-37.

<sup>19</sup> Leys, *Trauma*, 267.

<sup>20</sup> Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (Cambridge, MA & London, England: Harvard University Press, 1997), 22.

<sup>21</sup> Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 22.



theoretical works touching upon different aspects of postmemory and trauma. Among them is a rabbinical student and writer Dr. Esther Jilovsky who adds another dimension to the discussion about postmemory emphasizing that «... post-memory is both a memory removed from the source, and a personal interpretation of history.»<sup>22</sup> Alison Landsberg, in her turn, introduced the concept of **prosthetic memory**, arguing that the process of transmission of memory from parent to child is damaged, meaning not direct and complex. Another dimension of this transmission is mass culture that sometimes fetishizes and trivializes the Holocaust. Landsberg comments it with following: «At the same moment, the cinema and the technologised mass culture that it helped inaugurate transformed memory by making possible an unprecedented circulation of images and narratives about the past.»<sup>23</sup> What Landsberg implies is that our brain is not an archive, and his work follows a different logic: there are no folders rendered by time or space, where events took place. When remembering, the brain randomly picks memories in attempt to create an image. And of course this process is not precise. On the contrary, it is particularly subjective and conflates different memories. Landsberg's metaphor of prosthetic memory here refers us to the body structure, meaning that if not all parts ("members") are available in personal memory, the brain creates a "prosthetic limb" from collective memory or cultural tradition. In case of the second generation even existing memories can be repressed, creating a gap in knowledge. And in this situation the "limb" is taken from historical studies, literary fiction, testimonies of others, or (most importantly) by replacing time with space.

Alisson Landsberg concludes her speculation on prosthetic memory with the idea that the "access to [the memory]" would no longer be limited to the memories of events

<sup>22</sup> Esther Jilovsky, "Recreating Postmemory? Children of Holocaust Survivors and the Journey to Auschwitz," accessed March 5, 2020, [https://www.researchgate.net/scientific-contributions/2025645128\\_Esther\\_Jilovsky](https://www.researchgate.net/scientific-contributions/2025645128_Esther_Jilovsky).

<sup>23</sup> Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic memory : The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (Columbia University Press, 2004), 146.

through which one actually lived.”<sup>24</sup> Here again one can see how Halbwachs's idea of collective memory is implied in the notion of prosthetic memory. This is the crucial idea echoed in the works of Professor Ellen Fine. She offers a term **absent memory**, saying that the second generation Holocaust survivors “continue to remember an event not lived through.”<sup>25</sup>

As time passes the number of Holocaust survivors diminishes drastically, but the intergenerational trauma remains a burden of their descendants, the generation of “postmemory,” as Dori Laub has put it “participants and coowners of the traumatic event.”<sup>26</sup> Although none of them experienced the atrocities directly, the horror lives in them. As Ruth Leys notes: “The transmission of the unrepresentable — a transmission imagined by Caruth simultaneously as an ineluctable process of infection and as involving an ethical obligation on the part of the listener-therefore implicates those of us who were not there...”<sup>27</sup>

And finally, the next way of portraying trauma that I want to discuss is heterotemporality. Basically **heterotopia** and **heterotemporality**, concepts of Michel Foucault, represent the places that somehow disturb our normal concept of time.<sup>28</sup> Such time or space dimensions seem to be enclosed and separated from the surroundings. The question of time and space is of utmost interest in the case of Holocaust literature. Time and space contemporary to the narrator of autobiographical Holocaust fiction are complicated by the additional time and space layer of their elder family members, contemporaries of the Holocaust. The chronotope is perceived differently by the first and third generations of Holocaust survivors portrayed in the works.

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<sup>24</sup> Landsberg, *Prosthetic memory*, 187.

<sup>25</sup> Ellen Fine, “Transmission of Memory: The Post-Holocaust Generation” in *The Diaspora in Breaking Crystal: Writing and Memory after Auschwitz*, ed. Efraim Sicher, (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 187.

<sup>26</sup> Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York, 1992), 57.

<sup>27</sup> Leys, *Trauma*, 272.

<sup>28</sup> Michel Foucault, “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias”, *Architecture /Mouvement/ Continuité*, trans. Jay Miskowiec (October, 1984), 1-9.

Those are some useful concepts for understanding of second and third generation Holocaust literature. And now when an account of theoretical side of trauma is provided, I can move to its exemplary representation in our primary sources.

### **1.2.Exemplary Part**

I am going to proceed with illustrations of the processes described above, that are taken from my primary sources. In the theoretical part, close attention was paid to the notion of trauma, which gives me the necessary grounds to deal with the tools used for trauma representation. The first question I pose here is how the memory of Holocaust and World War II becomes a part of the worlding process of the portrayed characters. In this case narration is not only a tool of building worlds but also an instrument of understanding the world one lives in. The worldview of the characters is framed by the relation to the topic of the Holocaust and it is conveyed in the narration itself. On the one hand, it is a traumatizing memory of a contemporary of the world catastrophe. On the other hand, the obsession with the memorialization is brought to absurdity. In most cases taken, silencing makes postmemory generation start an investigation of their family past.

This pattern can be found in David Grossman's *See Under: Love* (1986). David Grossman (born 1954) is an Israeli writer known for his works on the topic of Holocaust postmemory, although he does not belong to a family of survivors. This novel is a complex work, that starts with the early life of a child of Holocaust survivors, Shlomo Neuman called Momik, his childhood in Israel in 1959 and acquaintance with his great-uncle Anshel Wasserman, who is brought to Israel as a concentration camp survivor years after the end of World War II. This man, who has lost his faculty of speech, is adopted by Momik as his grandfather. In prewar Warsaw, Anshel had been a popular author of children's stories, whose heroes are a group called "Children of the Heart," consisting of a Russian, a Jew, an Armenian, and two Poles (in a very cosmopolitan-utopist way). The relationship between

Anshel and Momik becomes a story of a 9-year-old boy's disillusionment with humanity. Momik's parents are suffering from panic attacks and keep talking about their European homeland as 'Over there'. When the boy asks for the meaning of this word he either gets silence from his parents, a nostalgic picture of a heaven on earth from other survivors living in his neighborhood, or a horrid image of a hell from his grandfather. Scared by his family behavior and emotional state, Momik decides to prepare for the next Holocaust. For this purpose he tries to create a Nazi beast, teasing and starving small animals. The second part of the novel shows Momik as an adult writer, fascinated with the personality of Bruno Schulz.<sup>29</sup> This section is a trip to Europe taken by middle-aged Shlomo in search for tools of expression and a world without violence. Shlomo travels to Poland in July 1981 at the time of the Solidarność protests, five months before Jaruzelski's martial law. Shlomo visits Warsaw, Gdańsk, and an imaginary fishing village, Narwia, where he tries to invent another ending to Bruno Schulz's life in his book. The third part is Momik's dialogue through time and space with his grandfather, Anshel Wasserman. In his imagination, the Warsaw Jewish storyteller survives the Holocaust by entertaining the Nazi camp commandant Neigel, with fairytales in which his "Children of the Heart" appear as grown-ups trying to resist the Third Reich. Neigel, the Nazi character, reveals to his wife the horrible details of his work, rapes her and commits suicide, while Anshel escapes the camp and loses his mind before being brought to Israel. The last part of the novel retells Wasserman's stories as an encyclopedia of the life of an imaginary boy from Anshel's stories, Kazik, who lives the whole human life in 24 hours.

In *See Under: Love* Momik's parents show signs of PTSD that terrify him but remain inexplicable to a child. Their behavior is strange and neurotic, they show outbursts of anxiety screaming from nightmares. And as the boy gets no explanation on the reasons

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<sup>29</sup> Bruno Schulz (1892 — 1942) is a writer, who was "owned" by one Nazi and then killed by another one out of revenge.

for it because of his parents' silence, he starts an investigation. He tries to find a place of 'Over there' that is used by his parents to speak about their Eastern European homeland, he attempts to define a Nazi beast and then produce his own one. Because of silence Momik prepares for the next Holocaust.

The novel *Everything is Illuminated*, published in 2002, is a travelogue of a young, Jewish-American writer, Jonathan (a full namesake of the real author). Jonathan Safran Foer (1977) is an American novelist whose grandfather Louis Safran, a Holocaust survivor, committed suicide after he immigrated to the US. The author made a trip to Ukraine in his sophomore year of college in 1997 in search of the shtetl of Trochenbrod, which appears as Trachimbrod in the novel. The novel reflects some elements of this actual journey,<sup>30</sup> but Foer found nothing in his trip — the shtetl was entirely razed and the memory about the Jewish heritage was absent.

The fictional Jonathan likewise tries to find out something about the pre-war life of his grandfather Safran by taking in July 1997 a heritage tour in what is now Ukraine, looking for the shtetl of his family, Trachimbrod. His main reference point in this trip is a photograph that his grandmother had kept: it shows the non-Jewish family that saved Safran, their young daughter Augustine being identified in a handwritten note. Jonathan's guide and interpreter is Alex Perchov, a Ukrainian student who is also twenty-one as Jonathan is. Alex has very poor English speaking skills that resemble a mixture of high flown words from the dictionary with slang and grammatical mistakes. Their driver is Alex's allegedly blind grandfather, who is followed by his "seeing-eye dog, Sammy Davis, Junior, Junior". This company travels from Lvov to Trachimbrod by car, sharing the hope that Augustine might still be alive. In the destination they find a very old Jewish woman Lista, who stores all the objects that are left from the village of Trachimbrod in boxes: rings,

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<sup>30</sup> Like the protagonist of his novel, Foer really had an old photo and was accompanied by a certain local guide called Alex, but this person had only his name in common with the book character.

photos, clothes, etc. Through her conversation with Alex's grandfather the participants learn his secret: living in nearby Kolky in 1942, he had betrayed his Jewish friend in order to save his family. After the trip the young men continue their friendship conversing via email. Alex's grandfather is tormented so much by his guilt that he commits suicide.

In the case of *Everything is Illuminated*, the quest for the unknown past becomes central for the narration. The story of the search for Jonathan's grandfather's shtetl is a romantic travelogue that is completed by an imaginary chronicle of his ancestors. Clearly both the quest and the chronicle come from the lack of information because of family silencing, and an urge to define oneself by the family history.

Rutu Modan (born 1966) is an Israeli illustrator and comic book artist. She is not from a survivor family, however, her family was also touched by the tragedies of the twentieth century. The topic of World War II and the Holocaust is central in her oeuvre. *The Property* is not an exception. This graphic novel was published in 2013 and is based on Modan's own family experience. It is a travelogue about coming back to the Eastern European homeland of the Jewish family. An elderly Israeli woman, Regina Segal, takes her granddaughter Mica to Warsaw after the death of Regina's son Reuven (Mica's father). At first it seems that they hope to reclaim property lost during the war, but the goal of the travel appears far more complicated. In 1939 Regina was pregnant from a Pole named Roman Gorski and was sent to Mandatory Palestine, where she was forced to marry another person. Her family members perished in Poland during the Nazi occupation. When Regina comes back to Warsaw after seventy years as an elderly lady, her secret purpose is to tell Roman that their son Reuven died. But she presents it to her granddaughter Mica as a journey to win back the property lost during the war (in 1991 a lawyer offers her to claim back her family's former flat in Warsaw). The reason for this is that Regina kept the secret of Reuven's biological father even after his stepfather's death. While competing for the

property with her aunt's fiancé Avram Yagodnic, Mica finds her real grandfather, Roman. Mica engages into an affair with a young Pole, Tomasz Novak, a would-be graphic artist, who works as a guide giving tours of Jewish Warsaw.

Regina's outdated worldview is her crucial characteristic. That is why it is brought up in the opening scene of the graphic novel. The old lady seems to be an extraterrestrial creature in her firm views on the practical economy and nationalistic relation to the Poles. The first encounter with the main characters happens in the airport, where Regina is asked to throw away her water, as it is not allowed to be in the hand luggage. The lady refuses to do so and after some failed attempts to convince the guard that there is nothing explosive in the bottle, she drinks the whole 1.5 liters at once, because it is "perfectly good water". The same pattern is repeated in the airplane, where Regina tells the flight attendant to offer her food to the next person as she has not touched it. I think Regina is portrayed as a very practical person because she faced the difficulties of the war and after war time. One can notice a similar trait in Vladek, Art Spiegelman's iconic *Maus* character who survived the camps. Both characters are typical representatives of their time, characters traumatized by the experience of scarcity. But silencing generates misunderstanding of the characters belonging to different generations. And that is why younger members of the family are embarrassed or annoyed by their parents' behavior. They just do not know about the horrid reason why this habit or trait started. And when the original context of war hardship is missing, the trait can seem quite comic in the peaceful world. It is interesting how the same situation in a book with a humorous topic would illustrate comic inappropriateness of the lady, not tragic one. In both examples we see that trauma can be seen by the close members of the family not only despite the silence, but also through the silence. Both situations are used as representational context where small details get their meaning. The way in which

Mica defends her grandmother's excentricity against the joking young Israelis shows her intuitive understanding.

In Modan's book this episode with water is used to bring the suspense to the reader, anticipating something strange in the following pages. Regina's story does not unfold from the beginning of the book. It consists of the hints and details opening to a careful reader, as the book has a detective component. Mica never learns the story of her grandma directly from her. The granddaughter's way of getting information is quite similar to the reader's. She follows some clues and her intuition, but grandma remains silent till the last page.

In the documentary *Shtetl* by Marian Marzynski (1996) a similar technique is used to move across time. Marzynski was born in a Jewish family in Brańsk, Poland, but he was baptized to keep safe and brought up by Poles, while he lost his parents during the war. The film begins with an idyllic story about an old American Jew, Natan, in search for his roots and a young Polish self-taught historian, Zbigniew, researching into Jewish past of his native Brańsk. However, the narrative quickly transforms into the director's personal accusation of Polish townspeople guilty, in his opinion, of the deaths of the Jews.

Heterotemporal is the nature of the flashbacks to the times of Marzynski's unhappy childhood. They are performed in black and white pallet, in contrast to the whole picture, thrilling and melancholic music accompanies the story of the partition with his mother. A small boy is chosen to play a role of an elderly director in his young years. This part of the film stands out from the narrative. It is not a "real" footage, the viewer seems to fall into a time that has never been and believe in it.

In Modan's graphic novel the time is doubled — two time frames exist in Warsaw in dialogical relationship — past and present. Thanks to the introduction of two time scales for Regina, the reader can peak into the thoughts of the character. The shift in time is very subtle — in her first flashback the streetcar window is used as a magic screen showing the



past.<sup>31</sup> Of utmost importance is also the color pallet, in this case sepia. It is used to illustrate the war throwbacks. We can see another example when Roman tells about the death of his friend and a deal with Regina's parents about her property. Most of the throwbacks are introduced with a help of cinematic devices. For example, one flashback is emphasized by the change of the frame of the panel and the color shift to grey.<sup>32</sup> The color scheme is meant to imitate the shooting methods of the time shown. The shot is aimed at the differentiation between the two timescales (compare with the films, where in the same way not only the color scheme, but also its size and resolution of the shot changes). However, Regina's other flashback is not represented in sepia or black and white. On the contrary, the color pallet is brighter and more vivid than the one used for the main narrative.<sup>33</sup> It is another benefit of the genre of graphic novel, which is free to use the colors to convey the mood of the character as well as one's attitude towards the depicted events. Interestingly, before the flashback<sup>34</sup> we see Regina walking out the door upset, realizing that the man she returned for does not recognize her. One can understand that it is a flashback to Regina's youth only because her name is mentioned in the dialogue. When the flashback is over the reader does not return to see the face of the person recalling the past, but to a different scene. I also consider it a cinematic device — a change of shot.

Everything in Warsaw is connected with the dead: even young people like Tomasz are involved in heritage tourism and young tourists try on the roles of the people going to their death. The Society for Jewish Memorialization organizes daily reenactments of the Nazis taking the Jews, where everybody just plays a role.<sup>35</sup> The guide is convinced that: "The regular old exhibitions don't interest the internet generation. They want to experience

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<sup>31</sup> Rutu Modan, *The Property* (Richmond, 2013), 194.

<sup>32</sup> Modan, *The Property*, 49.

<sup>33</sup> Modan, *The Property*, 56-58.

<sup>34</sup> Modan, *The Property*, 55.

<sup>35</sup> Modan, *The Property*, 159.

the real thing.”<sup>36</sup> At first Mica is outraged by the play, but later she jokingly comments on the idea, saying to Yagodnic: “Well, you rescued me from the Nazis.”<sup>37</sup>

To sum it up, one can see that the postwar situation complicated the transmission of Holocaust postmemory. The second-generation Holocaust survivors grew up with an unconscious awareness of their parents’ moral commitment not to transmit their trauma and to adhere to a strategy of silencing. That is why the family story is reconstructed by the generation of postmemory from external sources: literary imagination, heritage tours, and communications with contemporaries from Eastern Europe.

Trauma continues to exist in the following generations, framing their worldview and self-understanding. Another side of the urge to learn about the family past is the collective memory that a group identifies with. The representation of trauma in literary works is realized through the narrative gaps and muteness to illustrate the silencing. Heterotemporality serves as a tool of fragmenting the narrative to show the fragmentary knowledge and lack of vocabulary to speak about the Holocaust postmemory.

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<sup>36</sup> Modan, *The Property*, 130.

<sup>37</sup> Modan, *The Property*, 163.

## Chapter 2

### **Real-And-Imagined Places. Eastern Europe as a Postmemorial Landscape**

The second chapter of the thesis intends to explore the issue of contested memories of the spaces of Eastern Europe. The question I want to answer is how space is contested and recontextualized in the works of the generation of postmemory. The chapter includes an overview of the problem of contested memories of the land, then I provide the information about the real references of the literary spaces and how real places are portrayed in the Holocaust postmemory fiction, it is followed by an overview of the historical situation prior to the issue of the literary works that we discuss, then I give the necessary terminological apparatus for analysis of the representation of the spatial dimension in Holocaust postmemory fiction, and after that comes the problem of real people portrayal in the art work and how they come to be a subject to contestation.

#### **2.1. Root Tourism. Source and Purpose**

After 1989 many descendants used the opportunity to visit their parents' homeland not in imagination, but physically, participating in Holocaust tourism that started to prosper. Perhaps the widest term in this field is **heritage tourism**. Although this term is used in Foer's novel (quite ironically), I find it too general for the topic we discuss. The National Trust for Historic Preservation in the United States defines heritage tourism as "traveling to experience the places, artifacts, and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present. It includes cultural, historic and natural resources."<sup>38</sup> A special branch of heritage tourism is **dark tourism**. Dr. Shiladitya Verma defines dark tourism as "travelling to a location wholly, or partially, motivated by the desire for actual or symbolic encounters with death, particularly, but not exclusively, violent death, which may, to a varying degree be activated by the person-specific features of those whose deaths are its

<sup>38</sup> "Preservation Leadership Forum," The National Trust for Historic Preservation, accessed April 15, 2020, <https://forum.savingplaces.org/learn/issues#.Uz7tU1flvqE>.

focal objects.”<sup>39</sup> According to Kevin Fox Gotham among the examples of such places are guided tours to Chernobyl, battlefields, and concentration camps in Europe.<sup>40</sup> This special branch of dark tourism is of course called **Holocaust tourism**. According to Eva Heřmanová, Holocaust tourism implies visiting places connected with Nazi crimes against humanity<sup>41</sup>. Among them she states labor and extermination camps, Jewish ghettos, museums devoted to this topic, memorials of the victims of Holocaust, Holocaust related objects, and ground leveled villages. However, Erica Lehrer separates the last category from the notion of Holocaust tourism, saying that it has a different purpose.<sup>42</sup> Her term for journeys to the fatherland of Holocaust survivors taken by their descendants is **quest (or root) tourism**.<sup>43</sup> Lehrer’s argument for this division is based on the different purpose of the travelers. Root tourism, according to her, is aimed at the revelation of a story. She points out that “Many Jewish hearts are being scratched these days, judging from the number of Jews traveling to Poland on exploratory personal journeys, beyond the thousands of Jews who visit the country each year on insular mass missions.”<sup>44</sup> Root tourism is intimate and usually performed by the generation of postmemory; it aims to find something individual. Erica Lehrer considers this Jewish identity quest for the generation of postmemory as “a way to step into the flow of family, community, and history from which one feels displaced”.<sup>45</sup>

I completely agree with Lehrer’s argument for the use of root tourism and want to add one of my own. I see that not only the final goal of trips to the concentration camps and

<sup>39</sup> Shiladitya Verma, “Exploiting Tragedy: Dark Tourism,” *SSRN Electronic Journal*, no. 9, (2013), accessed April 5, 2020, [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=2306870](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2306870).

<sup>40</sup> Kevin Fox Gotham, “Dark Tourism and Disaster Tourism,” in *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, ed. G. Ritzer (2015), accessed April 26, 2020, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/9781405165518.wbeosd045.pub2>.

<sup>41</sup> Eva, Heřmanová, Josef Abrahám, “Holocaust tourism as a part of the dark tourism,” *Czech Journal of Social Sciences, Business and Economics*, no. 4, (2015), 19.

<sup>42</sup> Erica Lehrer, “The Quest: Scratching the Heart,” in *Jewish Poland Revisited: Heritage Tourism in Unquiet Places* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 12.

<sup>43</sup> Erica Lehrer, *Jewish Poland Revisited: Heritage Tourism in Unquiet Places* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 101.

<sup>44</sup> Lehrer, “The Quest: Scratching the Heart,” 92.

<sup>45</sup> Lehrer, *Jewish Poland Revisited*, 101.

similar places and visiting the places of one's family origin is different. Patrick Christian's arguments confirm this idea:

"The incomprehensible attraction that Halbwachs referred to is the endless need of the victim to revisit the phenomenological object of their trauma in order to repair the imbalance between texture and structure of suffering. Without this repair, the individual remains un-integrated with the collective in terms of memory and identity signaling alienation and shame of victimization."<sup>46</sup>

Another side of it is the scale is the opposition public vs. individual. Although we found an example of a group trip to a ground leveled village, it is not very common. I am talking about nowadays Trochenbrod, or better say the place where it once was. It presents quite an interesting case. Although nothing is left of the shtetl, it became a place of pilgrimage for its townsmen's descendants. On the web-page of Beit Tal, an organization in memory of the Trochenbrod and Lozisht Jewish communities, one can get an idea of such a journey:

"About 200 "Trochenbroders" will gather for three days. They will hold remembrance ceremonies at the sites of the town and the mass graves of its people, events that connect to the reborn small Jewish community in nearby Lutsk, and events that reach out to Ukrainians in the surrounding villages that once traded with Trochenbrod. They will refurbish and expand small monuments that mark the sites of Trochenbrod and the mass graves. And they will walk the soil, tell stories, remember, and celebrate the place that gave birth to their parents and grandparents."<sup>47</sup>

I find this announcement very interesting. It gives a glimpse into root tourism. The aim is clear: remember the stories of life. The main criticism of Holocaust tourism is of focusing on the tragedy, as if there was not any history of Jewish people in Europe before it. In an article devoted to the Holocaust museum in Poland the authors say: "Polish-Jewish journalist Konstanty Gebert noted, "people tend to forget that the important thing about Polish Jews is not that they waited 900 years for the Germans to come and kill them, but that they actually did something for those 900 years."<sup>48</sup> I suppose the Trochenbrod project is

<sup>46</sup> Christian, "History, Memory & Conflict: the collective memory of Maurice Halbwachs," 6.

<sup>47</sup> Avrom Bendavid-Val, "The Town of Trochenbrod: one of a kind in Jewish history", accessed April 20, 2020, <https://web.archive.org/web/20120217132845/http://bet-tal.com/index.aspx?id=2411>.

<sup>48</sup> Aleksandra Jankowska, Simone Müller-Pohl, Ella Street, "A Kosher Shrimp? The New Museum in the Context of Holocaust Tourism in Poland," *Humanity in Action*, 2015, accessed April 18, 2020,

not commercial compared to the industrial Holocaust tourism, which uses places of suffering as tourist attractions. One can just remember the project “Yolocaust” in this context, which denounces the visitors’ insensitivity.<sup>49</sup> This is another argument for the difference between mass Holocaust tourism and the individual root journey.

Actually, Foer himself comments ironically on heritage tourism in *Everything is Illuminated*.<sup>50</sup> In the novel the Ukrainian Perchov family works for a certain “Heritage Touring” office in America. The family shows no connection or particular knowledge of the events of the Holocaust, or even care for it. The grandfather works in this agency part-time as a driver. He recently retired on the grounds of his alleged blindness and drives with a guide-dog. His grandson Alex is chosen for the role of the translator for young American Jews. It is Alex’s first job. His knowledge of English consists of the dictionary lexis combined with the slang. No one cares for a person arriving from another country and his aim. The driver does not know where to drive, the translator does not know the language, the locals they meet during the trip are as hostile as possible, and there is no guide at all. Altogether this is a caricature of every heritage tour one could take in the late twentieth century. At least, I can assure you, English is still a rare skill for the countryside. And back then the language could not be very good among non-specialists, for the lack of practice. Knowing that before writing the book Foer visited the place himself one cannot help but think that the “Heritage Touring” is a grotesque of the author’s own experience.

The chosen examples show the principal difference between mass Holocaust tourism to the places of people’s suffering such as death camps, and intimate journeys in search for one’s roots.

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[https://www.humanityinaction.org/knowledge\\_detail/a-kosher-shrimp-the-new-museum-in-the-context-of-holocaust-tourism-in-poland/](https://www.humanityinaction.org/knowledge_detail/a-kosher-shrimp-the-new-museum-in-the-context-of-holocaust-tourism-in-poland/).

<sup>49</sup> “Yolocaust,” accessed April 17, 2020, <https://yolocaust.de/>.

<sup>50</sup> Jonathan Safran Foer, *Everything is Illuminated* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 4-6.

## 2.2. History of the Eastern European Homeland

After the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989 Jewish heritage tourism to Eastern Europe began. Many descendants of Holocaust survivors from all over the world got a chance to visit the homeland of their families. This process was so important that it became not only an intimate matter, but also a case of utmost interest for artists and historians. I will discuss the question of heritage tourism in the 1990s and its representation in works of art.

All the spatial references from the literary works we discuss have their real sources. Their fictional images have different degrees of lifelikeness. One reason behind this is the limitation of the access to the depicted places by the writers. But of course, regardless of having an opportunity to visit the place, every space represented in a work of art is also the product of artistic imagination. Let us first talk about the real reference of the depicted places.

The events of Jonathan Safran Foer's novel *Everything is Illuminated* (2002) take place in a shtetl (a small town) Trachimbrod, which back in the wartime was on the territory of Poland occupied by the Nazis, and now belongs to Ukraine. A real referent of the place is Trochenbrod. Originally the shtetl was a part of Russian territory in what had been the Russian Pale of Jewish Settlement.<sup>51</sup> In 1835 it got the name of Sofiyovka from the Russian government. After World War I, Trochenbrod belonged to Poland. It was situated in what is now North-Western Ukraine not far from the city of Lutsk. Trochenbrod was exclusively Jewish.<sup>52</sup> The reason for this fact was oppressive anti-Jewish decrees by Emperor Nicholas I. The main historian of Trochenbrod, Avrom Bendavid-Val, claims that "[Trochenbrod] became the only freestanding Jewish town ever to exist outside the biblical Land of

<sup>51</sup> Avrom Bendavid-Val, *The Heavens are Empty: Discovering the Lost Town of Trochenbrod* (Pegasus Books, 2011), 12.

<sup>52</sup> Trochenbrod & Lozisht community website, accessed April 16, 2020, <https://web.archive.org/web/20120229104530/http://www.bet-tal.com/index.aspx?id=2404>.

Israel.”<sup>53</sup> The history of Trochenbrod started in the early 1800s and before the war its population exceeded 5,000 people. Avrom Bendavid-Val comments: “Trochenbrod was a thriving regional commercial center that had a highly diversified and essentially self-sufficient economy.”<sup>54</sup> In June 1941 Nazis seized Trochenbrod and turned it into a ghetto. In August and September 1942, German security troops and the Ukrainian Auxiliary Police murdered nearly every citizen of Trochenbrod. According to the sources the number of victims is from 3,000 to 4,000 people, including citizens from nearby Lozisht, another shtetl. All the buildings in Trochenbrod were destroyed to the ground during the war. Now it is just a field surrounded by forests.

Both the novel *See under Love* by David Grossman (1986) and the graphic novel *The Property* by Rutu Modan (2013) are set in Warsaw. The first documented presence of Jews living in Warsaw dates back to the early XV century.<sup>55</sup> According to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, by the beginning of the World War II the Jewish population in Warsaw were estimated at 350,000 and growing.<sup>56</sup> It was the city with the biggest number of Jewish citizens in Europe, second to New York. After September 1, 1939 and Hitler’s invasion Warsaw was the target of heavy air attacks. It took the Nazis 27 days to seize Warsaw. Jews were required to wear discriminatory marks on their clothes starting from November 23, 1939. Many Jewish public organizations, including schools, property was confiscated and men were forced into labor.

In the fall of 1940 Jews, constituting 30 % of the Warsaw inhabitants, were packed into 2.4 % of the city space and sealed off from the rest of the population. People were dying from hunger and diseases. Mass deportations of people from the Warsaw ghetto to the

<sup>53</sup> Bendavid-Val, “The Town of Trochenbrod: one of a kind in Jewish history,” <https://web.archive.org/web/20120217132845/http://bet-tal.com/index.aspx?id=2411>.

<sup>54</sup> Bendavid-Val, *The Heavens are Empty: Discovering the Lost Town of Trochenbrod*, 13.

<sup>55</sup> Antony Polonsky, “Warsaw,” The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe, accessed March 18, 2020, <https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Warsaw>.

<sup>56</sup> “Warsaw,” Holocaust Encyclopedia, accessed March 18, 2020, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/warsaw>.



Treblinka killing center were carried out from July 22 to September 12, 1942. In January 1943, many ghetto inhabitants were sent to the forced-labor camps for Jews in the Lublin District. Poorly armed Jews resisted the soldiers. The survivors of the Warsaw ghetto uprising were sent to Poniatowa and Trawniki and to the Lublin/Majdanek concentration camp. The Holocaust encyclopedia states that “At least 7,000 Jews died fighting or in hiding in the ghetto, while the SS and police sent another 7,000 to the Treblinka killing center.”<sup>57</sup> On August 1, 1944, the Polish underground resistance army (Armia Krajowa) rose to liberation of Warsaw. The revolt was suppressed by the Nazis. As a result the center of the city was demolished by October 1944. 17,000 Jews were murdered during the time of the uprising, who were either found in hiding or fighting among Armia Krajowa. January 17, 1945 the Soviet army, which did not intervene in the uprising, liberated what was left of Warsaw.

The documentary film *Shtetl* by Marian Marzynski (1996) and the historical essay *Shtetl: the life and death of a small town and the world of Polish Jews* by Eva Hoffman (1997) take place in Brańsk. This town is located in what now is North-Eastern Poland near the Belarus border. The main historian of this town is Zbigniew Romaniuk, who featured in both the documentary and the book that we discuss. He describes Brańsk as “a very Polish and a very multiethnic place”.<sup>58</sup> Brańsk’s history dates back to the fifteenth century, and similar to many Polish towns it is not at all easy. In different times it was a part of Poland, the Kingdom of Prussia, the Russian Empire and finally it again belongs to Poland. Since the beginning of the eighteenth century, Jews were officially permitted to live in this area.<sup>59</sup> As in every other town, Polish-Jewish relationship was not always serene. The blood libel was replaced by stereotypes about Judeo-Communism. Some biases remain even now. Both

<sup>57</sup> “Warsaw,” Holocaust Encyclopedia, <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/warsaw>.

<sup>58</sup> Eva Hoffman, *Shtetl: the life and death of a small town and the world of Polish Jews* (Boston, 1997), 34.

<sup>59</sup> Antony Polonsky, “Brańsk,” The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe, accessed March 18, 2020, <https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Bransk>.

Marzynski and Hoffman show that some Brańsk citizens still believe that the Jews took away commerce from them, were dishonest and sly. In the beginning of the nineteenth century Poles boycotted Jewish stores. USHMM professor Antony Polonsky says that “According to the census of 1921, Jews accounted for 57.9 percent of the town’s 3,739 inhabitants, but by the outbreak of World War II, the numbers had fallen to about 50 percent.”<sup>60</sup> Days after the beginning of the war Brańsk was bombarded by the Nazis. In September 1939 Brańsk was occupied by the Soviet Union according to the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact and the following partition of Poland. All business, regardless whether it was Jewish or Polish, was confiscated by the state. In 1941 the Nazi army invaded Brańsk and ordered its Jews to build a ghetto, confining all the Jewish population there. There are reports about the new mayor and other Polish inhabitants mistreating Jews, who were accused to have collaborated with the Soviets. On November 8, 1942 almost all the Jewish population of Brańsk was transported to the Treblinka extermination camp.<sup>61</sup> Now there is not much left from the Jewish neighborhood.<sup>62</sup> Jewish cemetery tombstones were used by Nazis to pave the roads, five synagogues are destroyed with no traces. There are no Jews left in Brańsk.

After the atrocities of the Nazis in Eastern Europe not many Jewish survivors decided to go back to their places of origin and to what had been the homeland of their ancestors for many generations. Those who had the courage to do it met with the confrontation of their neighbors, some of whom had appropriated Jewish property and houses, having the idea that the Jews would never come back. The extreme of the conflicts of similar nature was pogroms. Pogroms are defined as “a mob attack, either approved or condoned by authorities, against the persons and property of a religious, racial, or national

<sup>60</sup> Antony Polonsky, “Brańsk,” <https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Bransk>.

<sup>61</sup> Zbigniew Romaniuk, *The Story of Two Shtetls: Brańsk and Ejszyszek, Part One*, (The Polish Educational Foundation in North America, 1998), 49.

<sup>62</sup> Eva Hoffman, *Shtetl: the life and death of a small town and the world of Polish Jews* (Boston, 1997), 35.

minority. The term is usually applied to attacks on Jews in the Russian Empire in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.”<sup>63</sup>

The old term got a new meaning in the postwar years: it usually ascended from the masses, not from the rulers. The culmination was the pogrom in Kielce in July 1946. I personally find it horrid how people laid hands on their close neighbors, knowing about the atrocities of the extermination camps that many of them came through, and after fighting a common enemy. So in the end, Poland, which before the World War II contained the largest Jewish population in Europe, during the war lost over three million of its Jews, who were murdered (that constitutes 90 % of the prewar Jewish population).<sup>64</sup>

The two main destinations of the survivors were the USA and the newly established State of Israel. There, people who faced the horrors of wartime were able to start their lives anew, raise children and grandchildren. In the minds of the generation of postmemory the heritage tours had the ancestral land as their destination, since they heard about Eastern Europe from their parents, blinded by nostalgia. Instead, they usually came to face the emptiness with no trace of the past Jewish life.

### **2.3. Real-And-Imagined Space**

These are some historical data on the places described in the primary sources under discussion. But one should not forget that no matter how realistic a portrayal of a historical place seems, it is still fictional. The writer’s imagination plays a big role in this process. Sometimes the situation is even more complicated because of external factors. In the case of Grossman, for example, it is physical inaccessibility of the place by real people. This obstacle is overcome by the use of fictional characters, whose possibilities are not limited. That is why his Warsaw appears to be a mental construct. But is any place and memory

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<sup>63</sup> "Pogrom," Encyclopædia Britannica, accessed April 20, 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/pogrom>.  
Tadeusz Piotrowski, *Poland's Holocaust* (McFarland, 2007), 217.

<sup>64</sup> Tadeusz Piotrowski, *Poland's Holocaust* (McFarland, 2007), 217.

about it accessible after decades without Jews? In many cases the memory of their presence is sustained artificially.

Another factor here is that in the context of postmemory the space is not just a geographical area. Eastern Europe is also perceived as a cultural construct by Jewish memory. Jews have an “alternative envisioning of spatiality”<sup>65</sup> when dealing with their Eastern European homeland. Basing on Edward Soja’s terminology we can call Eastern Europe **real-and-imagined space**. As Glebovskaya comments: “For Edward Soja «thirdspace» can be both material and mental, real and imaginary, and it occurs as a result of dialogue between the physical reality and speculative or cultural constructs. First of all, this concept denotes a transitional zone between different geographical and temporal loci.”<sup>66</sup> Here one can see the logic behind going to the place of the family origin. The idea is to reach the experience through the space, basically mixing dimensions. As Soja comments, in real-and-imagined space

“everything comes together... subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history.”<sup>67</sup>

There are many layers of perception of Eastern European space by the generation of postmemory. Firstly, it appears in Grossman's novel as a nameless country ‘Over there’, to which allude the narrator's parents, survivors. Then it is the object of encyclopedia articles representing objective knowledge. After that, it is a communal construct of Jewish memory. And finally, it becomes the individual perception of a geographical space:

“In this way, the heterotopia will spiral and result in an infinite approach to the state of utopia. In Thirdspace epistemology, real space has both subjectivity and objectivity, abstraction and concretization, reality and imagination, known and unknown, repetition and

<sup>65</sup> Edward Soja, *Thirdspace: Journey to Los Angeles and Other Real-And-Imagined Places*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 163.

<sup>66</sup> Maria Rubins, *Russian Montparnasse. Transnational Writing in Interwar Paris*, (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2015), 10. (Notes in Russian translation by A. Glebovskaya, *Novoje Literaturnoje Obozrenije*, 2017).

<sup>67</sup> Soja, *Thirdspace*, 57.

difference, construction and deconstruction, thought and body, consciousness and unconsciousness, singularity and diversity, daily life and endless history.”<sup>68</sup>

This multilayered notion helps to understand why the travel to the homeland of the parents is a very important stage in the life of a descendant of Holocaust survivors.

Because of the constant change of time scales in the process of bringing Poland to memory, the time there is frozen. In Modan's graphic novel, fetishized memories of the Shoah are role-played by the Polish tourist agencies. This process produces a heterotopia, in Foucault's terminology, tightly connected with the notion of heterotemporality.

The cover of *The Property* provides a wide view on the Warsaw cemetery. This image alludes not only to the closing scene of the graphic novel on the day of the remembrance of the dead, Zaduski. Of course this final is crucial, proclaiming the eternal remembrance of the fallen. But moreover, the cemetery is a leitmotif of the whole narrative. For example, in the very beginning Regina characterizes Warsaw as “one big cemetery.”<sup>69</sup> Foucault in his article *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias* notes: “The cemeteries then came to constitute, no longer the sacred and immortal heart of the city, but the other city, where each family possesses its dark resting place.”<sup>70</sup> And again we encounter the doubling of the urban space and place. I think that we can also apply the words of Foucault about the cemetery to the whole novel basing on Regina's characteristic of Warsaw. Foucault says: the “cemetery is indeed a highly heterotopic place since, for the individual, the cemetery begins with this strange heterochrony, the loss of life, and with this quasi-eternity in which her permanent lot is dissolution and disappearance.”<sup>71</sup>

The same process of creation of heterotopia and heterotemporality happens with the remains of the Jewish ghetto<sup>72</sup> and with the Warsaw Fotoplastikon, “a piece of real Warsaw

<sup>68</sup> Xin Li, Shangyi Zhou, “The Trialectics of Spatiality: The Labeling of a Historical Area in Beijing,” *Sustainability*, 10, no. 5, 4-5.

<sup>69</sup> Modan, *The Property*, 15.

<sup>70</sup> Foucault, “Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias”, 1-9.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Modan, *The Property*, 34.

nostalgia.”<sup>73</sup> The old Roman Gorski says about the reconstruction of the Nowy Świat street: “They should have left it in ruins instead of pretending nothing happened here.”<sup>74</sup> Grossman creates another heterotopia in the Warsaw zoo, which is also compared to a cemetery. In the Warsaw zoo, where the utopic gang of elderly “Children of the Heart” tries to hide from the Nazis, animals are dying from hunger and shelled by bombing. Finally, a boy is born and dead in 24 hours in this place. It is a clear reference to the children who were born in the camps and immediately sentenced to death.

In this way one can see how the real places are varied through the lens of the writer’s imagination. The generation of postmemory authors continues reproducing Eastern European landscapes in their art works as this space is of utmost interest and attraction for the descendants. To my mind this process is different from the general interest in horrid places, as it is a very intimate journey, even if taken only in imagination.

## 2.4. Real People and Their Characters

Earlier I discussed what changes some real places undergo when they are reworked by artistic imagination. The case is even more complicated when real people appear in some of our primary sources. Some of them had a very different biography in reality; and it happened that they lived to see the book publication or the documentary premiere. The latter situation could even lead to the prototype's leaving some comments about the character that was supposed to represent him. That was the case with Zbigniew Romaniuk, a character of both the documentary film *Shtetl* (1996) by Marian Marzynski and Eva Hoffman’s book *Shtetl: the life and death of a small town and the world of Polish Jews* (1997). The latter was issued rapidly after Marian Marzynski’s documentary as a polemical response. In her *Shtetl* Hoffman decides to tell another story, using the same historian, Zbigniew, and a

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<sup>73</sup> Modan, *The Property*, 65.

<sup>74</sup> Modan, *The Property*, 53.

former citizen of Brańsk shtetl now living in the USA, Jack Rubin (who is also a character appearing at the end of Marzynski's documentary).

Born in 1963, Zbigniew Romaniuk in the 1990s was a young man in his thirties. This detail about his youth (usually accompanied with naiveté) is emphasized by both of the authors portraying him. However, the attitude towards this person and his use in both *Shtetls* are quite different. For Marzynski, Zbigniew is a tool used to demonstrate that Poles are not ready to acknowledge their past shared with the Jews. Zbigniew is shown as a defensive person who tries to prove that “good” Poles, who helped Jews during the war, outnumber the collaborators. Marzynski's point here is that no matter how many good deeds were done, they do not cancel the crimes of the Poles. In an interview about *Shtetl* Marzynski says:

“He [Zbigniew] is confused and there are really two people in one. On the one hand, he wants to be a researcher but he's not ready to face another agenda. As angry, again, he sounds, to hide the fact and to whisper around Jews. As much he's appalled by what he learns later, that the world considers Poles blatantly anti-Semitic. And he thinks that his research proves that this is a very unfair judgment. So, his politics tell him to do everything to promote a good image of Poland. So he likes, of course, the fact that he is a good hard character, but he doesn't want to be alone because he's afraid that if he's alone, and he's confronted with the rest, the bad people, that finally the stereotype about Poles will still remain. So he's not very happy with it.”<sup>75</sup>

Real-life Zbigniew started a hot discussion through the correspondence with the director. Zbigniew did not expect the story to be focused on him, as he was just a guide and historian of his hometown. In the letters to Marzynski, Zbigniew tries to defend his truth. For example, in one part of the film one can see an old lady who is ready to accuse her neighbors of murder and becomes very passionate about it. Actually, most of the characters of the documentary are very old, and Marzynski is free to judge who of them is senile, and who is not. The lady claimed to have helped Jews who were hidden close to her house, feeding them. Her tremor and weak voice together with suspense of the music add to the growing tension. We cannot say how truthful her testimonies are, maybe she imagined

<sup>75</sup> “Questions for Filmmaker Marian Marzynski,” PBS, Frontline, accessed January 16, 2020, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shtetl/reactions/filmmakerques.html>.

them. This theory is confirmed by the letter that Zbigniew sent to Marzynski after seeing his film:

“The old woman (the vodka-peddler) is not credible, she is false. Her son killed and robbed a priest in 1945 in Bransk, his mother later helped him transport a pistol for more violent attacks in the Olsztyn region. The morality of this woman is low.”<sup>76</sup>

To all of Zbigniew’s comments Marzynski answers in a similar way that the following passage summarizes quite well:

“You treat the film as if it were a historical essay about the Jews in Bransk, while for me, a filmmaker, it has always been a psychological drama based on the facts. I didn't have a choice: Without strong characters and a plot involving them, you and I would put our viewers to sleep. Nobody could follow a story of an obscure little town in Poland unless I translate human emotions into a universal tale.”<sup>77</sup>

Although Eva Hoffman is not so harsh on Zbigniew as Marzynski, she cannot avoid the trope of naiveté, describing him. For her this young Pole is a guide through the history of Bransk. A volunteer trying to restore an old Jewish cemetery, who is not understood and victimized by his neighbors.

In this part I showed a couple of examples that illustrate the consequences of depicting a real character in an art work on the topic of Holocaust. One can easily see that apart from the moral dimension of a matter, especially with the deceased personae, there is also a matter of truthfulness and artistic interpretation. The last one is complicated by the existence of the person depicted after the issue of the work. And this person has another opinion concerning his/her depiction. By expressing this opinion the person creates a meta level of the artistic work.

## 2.5. Contested Memories

In all primary sources that I use, there is one common process that can be named the emergence of contested memories. It is a competition of memories between the Jews who left and the gentiles who stayed. These groups possess different traditions of memory,

<sup>76</sup> “...I cannot fully agree...,” Letter from Zbigniew [Zbyszek] Romaniuk to Marian Marzynski, PBS Frontline, accessed January 16, 2020, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shtetl/reactions/zbyszeklett.html>.

<sup>77</sup> “Marzynski's response,” PBS Frontline, accessed January 16, 2020, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shtetl/reactions/marianresponse.html>.



claiming one's own tradition the only true one. Each group wants to claim the memory of the place and thus in a way the space itself. Eva Hoffman rightly observes:

"Fifty years after the cataclysmic events, there is perhaps no past as powerfully contested as that of the Polish Jews. The Holocaust in Poland, and all of Polish-Jewish history, continues to be the embattled terrain of three different and sometimes bitterly competing sets of collective memory: Jewish memory, Polish memory, and the memory of the West."<sup>78</sup>

The West here represents general knowledge about the Holocaust, resting on the business of heritage tourism, which presents Eastern Europe as a human slaughterhouse. In Polish tourist web-pages one can easily book a tour around "Jewish Warsaw". Among the places of attractions of such a touristic route are Warsaw ghetto, Treblinka gas chambers, memorials and cemeteries.<sup>79</sup>

Jews are obsessed with the past, while Ukrainians do not care about its remains. For example, in the novel *Everything is Illuminated*, Jonathan flies from New York to Prague and travels by train to Lviv and to the Ukrainian countryside just to see that the shtetl of his grandparents does not exist anymore. His Ukrainian translator Alex and his family laugh about the stupid Jew who wasted his money going from the States (a heaven on Earth) to the Eastern European village to walk on the field. Although the Ukrainians live in this place for many years, they pretend that it has no Jewish history at all. This nation obsessed with the blessed West has no memory culture; all they commemorate is the first anniversary of the new constitution. There is the same picture in Eva Hoffman's *Shtetl* regarding the Poles. Practically no one wants to remember their Jewish neighbors; and the process of forgetting is maintained at the regional level. As Hoffman notes: "But taken collectively, the linking of Poland with the genocide involves a form of partial memory, which has enormously increased Polish defensiveness and rancor."<sup>80</sup> Marzynski's documentary of 1996 shows how

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<sup>78</sup> Hoffman, *Shtetl*, 12-13.

<sup>79</sup> "In your pocket," Essential City Guides, accessed April 13, 2020, [https://www.inyourpocket.com/warsaw/Jewish-Warsaw\\_73755f](https://www.inyourpocket.com/warsaw/Jewish-Warsaw_73755f).

<sup>80</sup> Hoffman, *Shtetl*, 15.

the town of Brańsk opens a memorial for the war victims, with not a single Jewish name appearing on it, although Jews constituted more than a half of the town's population. Brańsk chose not to remember. That was a situation contemporary to the second generation of survivor families, but the things were changing with time. So in *The Property* of 2013, Poles are pictured as obsessed with the preservation and revival of Jewish memory. They have special memorial societies that keep all the Jewish documents they can find. They role-act the Jewish deportations staging fake Nazi officers for the eager tourists. They claim to “miss the ghetto”. And even before the regime change, all Poles, Ukrainians and Jews want to claim Bruno Schulz, a Polish Jewish author and a character in *See Under: Love*, as their national heritage. In the novels the past is being rewritten from both sides: gentile and Jewish.

Poles and Ukrainians live in this space, but know close to nothing about a big part of the history of this land — the Jewish part. Jews, in contrast, are no longer dwellers of this land, but they are strongly attracted to the physical space and its history. Jews perceive the homeland of their parents as their personal roots. But neither Jews, nor gentiles really own the memory. They have to find their relation to the place and its meaning.

Such a quest can be seen in *Everything is Illuminated*. The blind grandfather opens his eyes and comes to terms with his wartime past when he understands Jonathan's search for it. In this way the stories blend into one. This was also the aspiration toward mutual dialogue promoted by Eva Hoffman, whose hope was inspired by the exemplary friendship between a Pole, Zbigniew, and an American Jew, Nathan, shown in Marzyski's documentary. As the director points out: “it's about a gentile [Zbigniew] that enters the Jewish world. It's not another film by a Jew about the Jews with the Jews. That is something that we badly need these days — to go across the groups and show how one group is seen

by another.”<sup>81</sup> Zbigniew and Nathan come from different sides to meet at one common point: the will to know the full story about their peoples’ past and to write a joint history of Jews and Eastern Europeans.

The example of the selected primary sources shows that space here is approached from two points of view: travel and imagination. Historical space comes to be transformed in literary imagination. In the works of the second and third generations of Holocaust survivors the space seems to be the direct way to the knowledge of the trauma of their family. As if all the intermediary are absent. However, in all of the analyzed works this is a journey to nowhere. There are no traces of the Jewish past in the places that they visit. The memory of the society that lives there has two extremes: an idyllic picture of the lost culture, or the cheapest stereotypes.

To sum it up, this chapter is devoted to the question of how the memory of Eastern Europe can be contested by those who live on this territory, and those who remember it differently. All the primary sources that I use emphasize this struggle and some of them try to suggest a solution. Those who do, see it in the dialogue between Eastern Europeans and the descendants of their former Jewish neighbors. They consider writing a common history as a way out of the conflict. I also argue that a concept of real-and-imagined spaces proves to be a useful tool for understanding the ideas of the authors of Holocaust literature. I explained the background of Holocaust tourism and why it is very necessary to distinguish between mass Holocaust tourism to the places of people’s suffering, and intimate journeys in search for one’s roots. Finally, I discussed the peculiarities of the depiction of a real person in Holocaust fiction, namely the moral dimension of their subjective contestation and the dialogical creation of a meta text by the personal post-issue responses.

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<sup>81</sup> “Questions for Filmmaker Marian Marzynski,” <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shtetl/reactions/filmmakerques.html>.

## Chapter 3

### Literary Testimonies

The task of this chapter is to show how writers of fiction react and contribute to our understanding of important themes like Holocaust postmemory. I examine the reasons behind the writing of postmemory fiction. Here I argue for the use of literary works of the generation of postmemory writers as testimonies and try to underline the main literary devices used by them for filling the void left by silencing, such as defamiliarization and labored reading. I also explain the reformation and hybridization of genres in postmemory fiction and pay close attention to one of the genre variations that of the fantastical in Holocaust narrative.

#### 3.1. Urge to Write a Story

For some people the title of this chapter can seem a little bit too far-fetched, but most of the academia agrees on using literary works as a source of testimonial material. This matter is very important in the case of the literature of the Holocaust survivors' descendants. The problem with the generations coming after the survivors is that their testimonies are close to unreachable. There is a very little number of sources of the second generation testimonies (for example, *Children of the Holocaust: Conversations with Sons and Daughters of Survivors* by Helen Epstein). One can imagine that the situation with the third generation's testimonies is far worse. No archive contains the evidence of their trauma, but they represent it in literary works. The arguments for usage of literary sources as testimonies are well summarized by Sara R. Horowitz:

“Art Spiegelman's insistence on the nonfictionality of *Maus* rests on several points: that the events of the Shoah can be adequately represented in language and graphics, that they can be successfully transmitted to those not part of the Nazi genocide, and that the artifice of animation notwithstanding, *Maus* tells a truthful story. Strategies of narration and transmission ("a novelistic structure") do not impinge on the truthfulness of testimony.”<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Sara R. Horowitz, *Voicing the Void: Muteness and Memory in Holocaust Fiction* (State University of New York Press, 1997), 5.

I find this argument quite convincing and want to add more ideas on that account. What are the criteria for authenticity, due to which a source can be named valid? Are not the archival documents pre-selected? Is not a video testimony following a certain narrating pattern used by the interviewer? Can the interviewee not lie? Or maybe he/she does not even understand that the memory about the events, especially traumatic ones, is changing with years. How, then, can we measure factuality? And as Sara R. Horowitz concludes this debate for art testimonies: “the reader or viewer becomes not so much a listener to a story, a memory, but a witness to ongoing acts of remembering, of reliving.”<sup>83</sup> And another function of the fictionalized structure is that it becomes important as it teaches about the Holocaust. The field of Holocaust literature is a pool from which the generation of postmemory draws the knowledge when facing the silencing.

The generation of postmemory has a moral demand of sincerity. They feel that they have to know the truth about the events of World War II and their victims. Often the survivors are reluctant to narrate their story of suffering. They cannot talk about it, but their descendants need to know. And the urge to write a story ends up with the writers’ imagined truth. Of course a number of moral issues are connected with the role of imagination.

For example, the figure of a real writer, Bruno Schulz, in Grossman’s novel is given a fate that is different from the historical one. Bruno Schulz (1892-1942) was a Polish artist and writer.<sup>84</sup> David Grossman states that the whole novel *See Under: Love* is inspired by Bruno Schulz, and the text is a tribute to his person.<sup>85</sup> But the peculiarity of Grossman’s works is that their author does not have a direct connection to the tragedy of the Holocaust in his family. Grossman’s mother was born in Mandatory Palestine, his father moved there from Poland with his family as a child, before the war. That is why the topic of *See Under:*

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<sup>83</sup> Horowitz, *Voicing the Void*, 7.

<sup>84</sup> Petri Liukkonen, "Bruno Schulz," *Books and Writers* (Finland: Kuusankoski Public Library), accessed February 19, 2020, <https://web.archive.org/web/20031203172735/http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/schulz.htm>.

<sup>85</sup> “See Under: Love. David Grossman on Bruno Schulz,” accessed February 15, 2020, <http://www.pen.org/event/2009/05/04/see-under-love-david-grossman-bruno-schulz>.

*Love*, that is the life and trauma of a child of Holocaust survivors, is not very easy from the moral point of view. Another aspect here is Bruno Schulz's fate. This writer died during the Holocaust, and this fact is sacred. When the Nazis took the town of Drohobycz in 1941, Schulz was forced into the Ghetto.<sup>86</sup> Being an artist, Schulz was taken under the protection of a Nazi officer in exchange for his painting a mural. Shortly after that Schulz was shot by another Nazi officer on the street as a revenge for the death of his "personal Jew".<sup>87</sup> In this context, the change of fate of this historical figure can even be considered as Holocaust denial. However, to my mind this gesture was meant only as commemoration and a gift of another life and end. In the book Schulz takes a voyage with a school of salmon, engaging into the conversation with a female personification of the sea.

The urge to write a story resulted in the appearance of literary testimonies. As Sara Horowitz says when there are no people left to testify: "Only an imaginative leap reveals what might have been their story, simultaneously reproducing and revoking the radical muteness genocide imposes."<sup>88</sup> Another urge — to read a story — made it possible for wider circles to learn about the Holocaust from novels. But the process of writing on such a delicate topic is of course not easy. The writers faced a lot of obstacles on which we speculate in the next part.

### 3.2. Narrative Emphasized: Labored Reading and Defamiliarization

One of the main problems of the transmission of the knowledge about the events of the Holocaust is the lack of a language to speak about it. The connection between trauma and language was rightfully emphasized by Ruth Leys in her major work on trauma:

"the Holocaust in particular is the watershed event of the modern age because, uniquely terrible and unspeakable, it radically exceeds our capacity to grasp and understand it. And since this is so, the Holocaust is held to have precipitated, perhaps caused, an

<sup>86</sup> "History of Jews in Drohobycz," Virtual Shtetl. Museum of the History of Polish Jews, accessed February 15, 2020, <https://web.archive.org/web/20141110070057/http://www.sztetl.org.pl/en/article/drohobycz/5,history/>.

<sup>87</sup> Ryszard Kapuscinski, *Imperium*, trans. Klara Glowczewska (London: Granta, 2007), 291.

<sup>88</sup> Horowitz, *Voicing the Void*, 13.

epistemological-ontological crisis of witnessing, a crisis manifested at the level of language itself.”<sup>89</sup>

The problem of lacking vocabulary to represent trauma takes an important place in postmemory fiction on several levels. On the level of structure it is presented as several narrative, ruptures and suspense. On the level of speech it is shown in pausing, stream of consciousness, muteness of the characters and distorted speech.

In Grossman’s novel defamiliarization is widely used. A number of times the strangeness and unnaturalness of war is represented through the children’s perception. At first it is Momik, who does not understand his parents’ fixation on the land of “Over there” (their shorthand of the former Eastern European homeland). He tries to reproduce the “Nazi beast” of which he heard so much. Anshel Wasserman, Momik’s grand-uncle, has written in his youth tales about a childrens' gang called the "Children of the Heart". In the narration built by the Israeli second-generation character (who is also the author of the encyclopedia of Kazik’s life) they get older in the stories told to a Nazi officer Neigel, but remain under the same name. The last part gives the Israeli author's invention of the stories that Wasserman told the Nazi. Most of them involve a child, Kazik, in interaction with the grown-up "Children of the Heart" and wartime experiences of persons that Momik would meet as survivors in his Israeli childhood. This part is called encyclopedia, as Kazik lives the whole human life in 24 hours and tries to understand all the things that he encounters. The mystery of his disease thanks to that Kazik is doomed to live one hour for several years is a metaphor for all the people in death camps. Similarly, they did not choose their fate, living the last days under the sign of premature death.

The young Ukrainian Alex, a character of Foer’s novel, clearly presents an example of distorted speech. The translator of the novel *Everything is Illuminated*, Vasily Arkanov, in the preface to the Russian edition comments on the manner in which Alex expresses himself: “He uses the words in the wrong context, then he pours forth clericalisms,

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<sup>89</sup> Leys, *Trauma*, 268.

believing that the epistolary style requires it. He confuses tenses, or he interprets the meaning of the idiom too straightforwardly”.<sup>90</sup> You can see one of the examples of Alex’s style below:

«My legal name is Alexander Perchov. But all of my many friends dub me Alex, because that is more flaccid-to-utter version of my legal name». <sup>91</sup>

The specific of Alex’s speech introduces **defamiliarization** into the text. Viktor Shklovsky, the author of this concept, describes defamiliarization in the following way: “The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar,' to make forms difficult to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged”.<sup>92</sup> In this way defamiliarization serves to create an unusual viewpoint on things, which contributes to a better understanding of their nature. It is not easy to read the parts written by Alex, and this difficulty draws the attention to them. **Labored reading** increases the understanding of the things he read. The main function of Alex’s twist of the tongue is to illustrate the lack of a linguistic expression for the Holocaust. The road to Trachimbrod is empty and numb. The journey in search for the homeland ends up with emptiness. Using this technique, the author shows the reader that the locus has disappeared, and the path to it is difficult. People living in Ukraine do not know about these terrible events, or they do not want to remember them, which means they cannot express them in either case. It is not by chance that Alex’s grandfather, who lies about his wartime experience, calls himself blind and asks for a guide dog: he refuses to see the truth, it’s easier for him to live pretending that nothing happened.

In Rutu Modan’s graphic novel *The Property* defamiliarization is expressed at the level of irony, pervading the whole text. For example, it can be clearly seen through Polish

<sup>90</sup> Vasily Arkanov, “Instead of a Preface”, in *Everything is Illuminated* by J. S. Foer, trans. Vasily Arkanov (Moscow: Publishing house "Э", 2017), 5-7.

<sup>91</sup> Foer, *Everything is Illuminated*, 5.

<sup>92</sup> Viktor Shklovsky, *Viktor Shklovsky: A Reader*, trans. Alexandra Berlina, (Bloomsbury, 2017), 16.



obsession with Jewish memory. The urge to preserve the Warsaw Ghetto through the reenactment portrayal is simply grotesque. Such hyperbolization helps the reader see the absurdity of the thing. At the same time, the young Jewish woman Mica is accidentally caught in the reenactment of a Nazi roundup of Jews, experiences for a moment the absurdity and fear of her people. Throughout the novel many characters change their typical roles.

Eva Hoffman does not use defamiliarization in her book. The reason for this is that defamiliarization is an artistic device, while Hoffman perceived her *Shtetl* as historical essay.

The troubled narrative of the generation of postmemory emphasized the lack of language. It is expressed by such literary devices as defamiliarization, labored reading and narrative ruptures.

### 3.3. Reformation and Hybridization of Genres in Postmemory Fiction

The introduction of such a complex and morally uneasy topic as Holocaust postmemory not only lead to changes in narrative it necessarily affected the genre nature of the literary works on this topic.

A discussion around the famous saying by Theodor Adorno on the impossibility of writing poetry after Auschwitz<sup>93</sup> continues even now. Although some scholars argue that he was cited wrongly and thus misunderstood<sup>94</sup>, Adorno's name became a topos<sup>95</sup> in the context of the artistic representation of the Holocaust. Quite commonly the moral gravity of the topic is thought to be impossible to represent in fiction. Another difficulty in the fictional treatment of the Holocaust topic from the point of view of the generation of

<sup>93</sup> Theodor Adorno, "Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft," in *Prismen. Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft* (Munich, 1963), 7–26.

<sup>94</sup> Klaus Hofmann, "Poetry after Auschwitz – Adorno's Dictum," *German Life and Letters*, Volume 58, no. 2, (2005), 182 - 194.

<sup>95</sup> "Topos" meaning "commonplace". See Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1953), 80.

postmemory is the lack of information. I would add here that it is not easy to find previous examples of literature on a similar topic. In this way there is no literary tradition to base on. All abovementioned points lead to the conclusion that second generation Holocaust survivors had to invent new ways of speaking about the tragedy of their people. Their experience altered not only the language of the representation of trauma, but also the narrative and the genre. The continuity of the Holocaust narrative was broken.

In the fictional works that I discuss the narrative is never going to be linear. For example, Foer, who adapts many traits of his novel *Everything is Illuminated* from the tradition of magical realism, has to make some major changes. In the classic magical realism text of Gabriel García Márquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the creation myth is looped, thus the exact number in the title. In contrast, the loop of the myth in *Everything is Illuminated* is torn, because the earth has never before endured such a worldwide catastrophe. The mass extermination of people in the era of technology is a fact that seems somewhat implausible, and here J.S. Foer emphasizes the temporal proximity of this horror, the indisputable fact of its existence.

All fictional works that I analyze here have one generic trait in common, and that is the **travelogue**. According to György Tverdota, travelogues belong to the so-called “epic” literature, an old multi-genre narrative: they narrate the adventures of movement, alternating with impressions and thoughts.<sup>96</sup> Thus, the travelogue is a hybrid genre. It combines traits of different genres, such as epistolary novel and diary, and it is always centered on the story of travel. As the journey to the Eastern European homeland of their parents becomes crucial in the generation of postmemory self-understanding, the genre of travelogue seems to be a perfect way to represent the efforts to cope with trauma.

As I already mentioned, the biggest problem of postmemory studies is the question of sources. By this time there are particular methodologies and tools allowing to work with

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<sup>96</sup> György Tverdota, *Écrire le voyage*, (Presses de la Sorbonne Nouvelle: Paris, 1994), 6.

the testimonies of direct participants<sup>97</sup>. But where can **testimonies of descendants** be found? Their voices can be heard in some archival video interviews, for example, those in the Visual History Archive.<sup>98</sup> But the second-generation Holocaust survivors are used as an illustration of the fate of their parents, the interview focus is not on the generation of postmemory itself. Nobody recorded their voices, even though sometimes they can be seen as the secondary characters. I argue that the experience cannot be transmitted through academic works (often the search started mostly with scientific purposes, as in J. S. Foer's case), but the meaning found by the authors can be read in biographical pieces resulting from the journey to the roots. That is why the present research, based on chosen literary sources (four novels and a documentary film by the descendants') is considered to be especially fruitful, as it addresses the generation of postmemory's trauma directly.

Grossman's, Foer's and Modan's books are united among other things by the characteristics of an initiation novel. According to Nadezhda Shalimova, an initiation novel is devoted to the testing of the protagonist and his socio-ontological modality expressed in readiness to be an adult.<sup>99</sup> In Foer's case *Everything is Illuminated* is a combination of epistolary novel, a travelogue, and a mythical family saga. *See Under: Love* also has a mythopoetic intention. Moreover Grossman chooses to combine the initiation novel with a fairytale about children who lose their waymark in life after seeing incomprehensible atrocities. This *mise en abyme*<sup>100</sup> is modeled on Scheherazade's tales, and that is confirmed by the pseudonym of Wasserman. And in the "real" realm the series of the stories can be found in a newspaper quoted in the novel. Eva Hoffman with all her striving towards objectivity puts her narration into the frame of a historical essay. But even this genre is

<sup>97</sup> Lawrence Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (Yale University Press, 1991), 26.

<sup>98</sup> "Visual History Archive Online," USC Shoah Foundation, accessed April 10, 2020, <https://vhaonline.usc.edu/>.

<sup>99</sup> Nadezhda Shalimova, "Initiation Novel as an Invariant of the Bildungsroman," *Bulletin of KSPU im. V.P. Astafieva*, 30, no. 4, (2014), 266.

<sup>100</sup> *Mise en abyme* here means a story within a story.

disturbed by a travelogue, which lets her combine the objectivity of a historian with the intimacy of the story told by a person who can relate her own story as descendant of Holocaust survivors.

Rutu Modan presents a very interesting case of the genre change brought about by the topic. The history of the collaboration of graphic novel and the topic of the Holocaust started from Art Spiegelman's *Maus*. His choice of genre in 1980 resulted in a big scandal. Michael Schuldiner comments on it with the following: "In particular there is the larger question of whether it is possible to do justice to the Holocaust in any type of medium, let alone the comic book... ." <sup>101</sup> Spiegelman chose zoomorphous characters, typical of the genre of comic, to make the shift of the topic easier. However, the portrayal of different nations as different species added characteristics of a fable to the text. Animals are typical characters of this didactic genre with their conventional features. Jews represented as mice are scared, Nazi-cats are sly and cruel, Poles portrayed as pigs are stupid and self-interested. This stereotypical division implies the iconic mode of Holocaust representation, with the Jew being the absolutely innocent victim and the Nazi being the absolute evil.

Modan in turn does not follow these stereotypes, but plays with them. The world in her texts sometimes seems to be turned upside down. Let us examine one of the ironic scenes in detail. Mica is tired of her grandma's acquaintance Avram Yagodnic following her around in hope to acquire family property, a real estate that they owned before the war. She seizes the moment when he is distracted and hides from him in the nearest café. A young Pole (later we will learn that his name is Tomasz) notices Mica, but she makes a gesture asking him to be silent. When Avram enters the café Tomasz lies to him that she is not there. What an irony: a Jew hides from another Jew! <sup>102</sup> Actually at the end of the novel Avram appears to be the antagonist. The Nazis are not present in the story line at all. One

<sup>101</sup> Michael Schuldiner, "Writer's Block and the Metaleptic Event in Art Spiegelman's Graphic Novel, "Maus"" *Studies in American Jewish Literature*, Vol. 21, 109.

<sup>102</sup> Modan, *The Property*, 38.

can find them only as an image of the image in Tamasz's scetches.<sup>103</sup> There we again encounter the iconic mode of representation: Hitler, angry soldiers with German Shepherds, Tiger tanks, and brave and beautiful Polish officers opposing the Nazis in the Warsaw uprising.

Actually, Modan loves to play with all kinds of stereotypes: from nationalistic to genre-specific. The Polish accountant comments Mica's nationality, without any attempt to be rude, with stereotypes about Jews: "People like you are exactly what Polish economy needs: smart, industrious, family people... Jews in general."<sup>104</sup> Modan's metafictional play with stereotypes includes the stereotypes about comic main topic being superheroes.

I cannot skip the most important feature of the graphic novel. The graphic novelist needs words only to tell about the events, not the emotions, and that is the main benefit of the genre. Regina's facial expression shows it all:<sup>105</sup> from the buffoonery and business air to despair and loneliness. As Sara Horowitz notes:

"The commix format mixes narrative with graphic representation in the progression of line-drawn panels, utilizing a medium Spiegelman describes as "without pretensions to art" (Dreifus 34), to enact a "modest" genre of Holocaust art, born of history, remembrance, and comic strip drawings."<sup>106</sup>

The graphic novelists are also lucky for not having to worry much about the translation of their works, because the most important part of their narrative is visual.

Another peculiarity of the graphic novel is narrative metalepsis, that according to Gerard Genette is the transition from one narrative level to another without the need for explicit narration.<sup>107</sup> I would like to refer here to Michael Schuldiner, who says that in it "...the aural and visual combine or, sometimes, collide."<sup>108</sup> Modan skillfully shows two modes of telling the story: verbal — light and detached, visual — tough and touching.

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<sup>103</sup> Modan, *The Property*, 88.

<sup>104</sup> Modan, *The Property*, 66.

<sup>105</sup> Modan, *The Property*, 20.

<sup>106</sup> Horowitz, *Voicing the Void*, 2.

<sup>107</sup> Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: an Essay in Method* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 234-37.

<sup>108</sup> Michael Schuldiner, "Writer's Block and the Metaleptic Event in Art Spiegelman's Graphic Novel, "Maus"" *Studies in American Jewish Literature*, Vol. 21, 109.

Firstly, the reader learns the story about Regina's emigration from Mica.<sup>109</sup> Getting into a relaxed mood after smoking a joint, she tells Tomasz about a rumor that runs in her family and that claims that her grandma left Poland pregnant from a gentile. Sending her to Palestine was done to cover the shame of pregnancy unwanted by the family, but shortly later the war broke out and Regina never returned. The text is written, no illustrations provided, even the character is relaxed: we cannot see anything in her facial expression. It is done to show that for her, as well as for the reader, this story is just a spicy gossip. A few pages below we encounter the same story drawn by Tomasz.<sup>110</sup> To contrast the narratives Tomasz's *comic in the comic* (another example of *mise en abyme*) is drawn in a different style and it is black and white. It also has a different mood — deeply tragic, not a shade of irony intrinsic to Modan's narrative is present. Mica's facial expression on seeing his drawings shows astonishment, she is deeply hurt and disturbed by the possible publicity of her family secret.

Moreover, upon a closer look the set-in comic shows the scene already depicted previously in Regina's brightest flashback.<sup>111</sup> The scene shows her in 1939 as a young girl with her Polish lover, rowing a boat to escape together, before being stopped by a frontier guard. These panels are followed by the parting of the lovers by the ship. But this story about Regina's past is just a parenthesis in Tamasz's narrative about Mica and grandma's Warsaw adventures, where he is also an actor.

I think that what is presented here is more than just a simple tribute to the genre of the graphic novel. Of course, this contrast shows the difference between media: the "old" textual novel and the new graphic one. But it also illustrates the meta level of the comic. One of Tomasz's pages contains preparatory work for the making of his graphic novel about

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<sup>109</sup> Modan, *The Property*, 94.

<sup>110</sup> Modan, *The Property*, 146.

<sup>111</sup> Modan, *The Property*, 56-58.

WWII. The work of thought shows the layout of the division into the panels, process of creating a dialogue, and sketches.

The examples here show that the introduction of the topic of the Holocaust to literature could not leave the narrative in the existing genre frames. It provoked changes on several levels of the text, changing the vocabulary and narrative structure.

### 3.4. Functions of the Fantastical in Holocaust Narratives

And of course the drastic changes in the structure of the novel could not leave the contents behind. The tools of trauma representation developed greatly. One of the most interesting cases of the genre variation, to my mind, is introducing the fantastical into a narrative about memory, trauma and history.

This part aims at examining the functions of everyday miracles in two post Holocaust novels, David Grossman's *See under: Love* as an example of second generation literature and Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything Is Illuminated* representing the third generation. The main characters of both novels are writers who use fantastic elements when coping with trauma. Their literary fantasy, however, is a multifunctional tool. It serves not only to show a lacuna in the artistic representation of a calamity of such scale and the lack of language to express it, but also to illustrate the continuity of its image from the survivors to the descendants' mind. This notion of transmission and the attempts of its apprehension frame both authors' worldview.

Due to the peculiarities of the topic and a lack of vocabulary to speak about the Holocaust and its memory, the authors have to address new forms of chronotope<sup>112</sup> to implement their ideas. Both writers fraction the narration into parts that differ stylistically and are connected only through common characters. The experiment with time immediately affects the locus. Grossman uses several "real" locations including the family home in an

<sup>112</sup> Chronotope is a joint category of time and space, introduced to literary theory by Mikhail Bakhtin. See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Voprosy literatury i estetiki* (Moskva: Khudojestvennaya literatura, 1975).

immigrant suburb of Jerusalem and an unnamed concentration camp, as well as a Polish fishing village on the Baltic coast which becomes the imaginary locus of a fantastic impersonated sea, portrayed as a woman-goddess, and finally a place that can be quite relatively called Warsaw in the 1930s. The site is given an exact name of a real city, but the portrayed one has something in common only with tourist postcards. The Israeli author has never visited Poland before writing the novel and in this manner the truthfulness of the geographic location has nothing to do with its fictional portrayal. In Foer's case the past of the shtetl also acquires a special locus, and he is more focused, using just two intermingling types of chronotope. His device here is similar to G. Garcia Marquez's as it is also a family saga concentrated in one enclosed place, unaware of and not caring about the rest of the world around it. Thereby, both novels about the Holocaust follow a double movement of travelling back in time and bringing fantastic layers of narration into the descriptions of real places.

The novels share not only the common strategy of using fantastic elements from the point of view of chronotope, moreover, they have parallel characters with superior qualities of survival and foreknowledge. Anshel Wasserman in Grossman's novel gives an example of miraculous lifetime, since he does not die from the Nazis' bullets. Other such examples are Bruno Schulz, who dies a self-chosen death different from his real assassination, Kazik, who lives his life in a day, and the "Children of the Heart," who grow up and yet stay children. These are figures of the protagonists' ancestors that share a quality of immortality, for better or for worse, which can be interpreted as a metaphor of the persistence of memory and the direction of the protagonists to the past. But these survivor characters are helpless bystanders watching the atrocities. The female ancestor in Foer's novel, Brod, learns about the rape by the Polish village lord that will happen to her in few years, but the future is fixed for her, and similar to mythological Cassandra she cannot affect history. In this way, the



suffering is not constructed from memory, it lives on. It is an illustration of the Holocaust descendants' fatal bond with history that can only be accepted, not changed. This understanding of impossibility to help the family results in continuity of trauma.

The uncanny is represented by one of the central characters of Grossman's novel, the Nazi beast, which is an objectification of anti-Semitism. The secret of its utmost monstrosity lies in the fact that it has no embodiment. There is a sub-category of chronotope, the country of "Over there", that is out of reach for Momik, but it is occupied by all of the portrayed survivors, who seem to exist in the protagonist's realm only bodily. It is a fantastic embodiment of continuity of memory and a past lived in the present. Momik wants to discover a vaccination against the Nazi beast in order to enter the enchanted country, vanquish the beast and return every person that was lost there. He wants to rescue his parents from their self-isolation and anxiety. The fear is omnipresent in the life of the survivors after the Holocaust and Momik decides to prepare himself to the next catastrophe. In his endeavor to find the beast in small animals by keeping them in cages and starving them to death, Momik becomes the creator of his own concentration camp and finds the evil in himself. This strong statement illustrates the present picture of continuity of the existence of anti-Semitism in modern world, a world that has seen the calamity of humanism just two generations ago.

Lista, the mentioned female character in *Everything is Illuminated*, can be also considered as a mythological figure, memory itself, because she is in some way immortal, as the bullet shot into her internal organs kills only her fetus. She is a keeper of all the knowledge the travelers were looking for, moreover, she is able to make Alex's grandfather reveal his secrets. And the baby she is looking after is in fact a simulacrum of the lost village, of the forgotten past.

Another function of Lista is to give an emblem of Holocaust museums. She is a keeper of memories (a stereotypical function of women again), a collector who stores all the remained belongings of the dead people of the shtetl. But she is speechless, and there is no authenticity in all the materials she has. The things cannot tell a story, unless they are orderly inserted in some kind of a narrative. And this illustrates how memory is constructed regardless of a degree of authenticity of sources.

Although one can see in Foer's novel some moments of self-reflection upon the question of female representation as a mere function in the novel, the character of Lista is not developed and stays in the realm of idealized female non-earthly figures-functions, who represent nice and pleasant helpers to men. Thus, the novel represents a typical Holocaust canonical narrative from a male perspective in which the role of a woman can only be traditional. The photo of Augustine, being the central artifact around which the narrative is organized, illustrates the impossibility of any reconstruction of historical events that is based on one visual document without a context.

All in all, the category of the fantastical has different functions in the Holocaust narratives, representing the continuity of trauma, the lack of vocabulary to speak on this topic, the persistence of anti-Semitism, and the endurance of memory.

To conclude this chapter, I want to emphasize the possibility and importance of using literary writing as a testimony of the generation of Holocaust postmemory. The reason to write one is behind the urge to tell a story of individual trauma, in this way redeem it and share it with the world. Another side of this process is that the reader is learning about long-lasting aftereffects of the Holocaust, and in this way the story of the traumatized person is heard. Literature provides some tools of filling the void left by silencing. Among them, defamiliarization and labored reading that help the writer to express the incomprehensible atrocities and their possibility in a modern world, sending the message "Never again".

Hybrid genres such as the travelogue make a space for the artistic expression of trauma, one of the most interesting examples of which is the appearance of the fantastical in trauma literature. In this way, one can see that literature, although a slow medium, keenly reacts to the processes taking place in society. Literature takes an intimate point of view on the situation, one of the insider and sufferer, and helps to share the pain and experience with a general public.

## Conclusion

This thesis constitutes an interdisciplinary analysis of Holocaust trauma representation. The work aimed at the analysis of historical changes in Eastern Europe of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. It treats literary works of the generation of postmemory as unique testimonies of the long-lasting effect of Holocaust and a useful lens through which one can look at the perception of historical events. This research argues that with time the memory of the Jewish history of Eastern Europe comes to be contested among Jews, Eastern Europeans and Westerners, meaning the general public. This transformation is brought about by the change of the political regime and leads from total indifference to close attention. For Jews of younger generations, the notion of root tour becomes closely connected to the idea of filling the gaps left by silencing in the imagination of the descendants of Holocaust survivors. That is why the Eastern European homeland of their (grand)parents becomes a longed-for place, firstly visited in the imagination when being communist, and after that physically. Thus, during the past four decades the conditions have changed under which literary works address the Holocaust.

The first chapter of the present study can be characterized as anthropological. It provides a theoretical apparatus for speaking about traumatic memory. The concept of prosthetic memory proves to be quite useful when analyzing silencing. Silencing is used as a multifunctional tool: for the depiction of external silencing (a refusal to tell a story by the direct participants to their children) and of personal silencing (lack of the vocabulary to speak about trauma and the repercussion of prosthetic memory). The selected primary sources provide examples of how traumatic memory shapes the individual worldview. Heterotemporality is widely used to transmit the detachment of the characters from the society due to their incapacity to deal with the personal trauma. Heterotemporality also discontinues the narrative showing knowledge gaps and absence of vocabulary.

The second chapter is devoted to the spatial matters in the works of the generation of postmemory. Trochenbrod, Brańsk, and Warsaw, existing places with their history and memory culture, were compared to their literary representation. The memory of the space is contested between Jews and Eastern Europeans, and the solution for this struggle is the idea of writing and telling a common history. This part of the work provides a historical context characterizing the time of creation of these literary testimonies. Special attention is given to the phenomenon of heritage tourism. I explain why post-communist Eastern Europe, as experienced in root trips, became the imaginary framework of postmemory literary representation. Trauma representation historically develops from silence to the urge to tell an authentic personal story. The root tour proves to be not only a way to understand oneself, but also a path to communicate with the social group the traumatized belongs to.

The last chapter of the thesis is devoted to literary discourse. Literature is used as a platform to share the trauma, and it is a source of knowledge about the Holocaust and its repercussions. I examine the hybridization of literary genres caused by the introduction of the postmemory topic. Close attention is paid to the very common hybrid genre of the travelogue, which combines the traits of different genres and fits the importance of the root tour to Eastern Europe for the descendants. Trauma representation is evolving from fantastic and uncanny in 1980s to humoristic in 2020s.

To conclude, I want to say that all the plans made in the beginning of the work were successfully realized and the research resulted in a number of findings. Among them is the evolution of the treatment of memory in Eastern Europe, which passes from indifference to obsession. A central message of the postmemory literature urging is to create a common historical memory among Jews and Eastern Europeans. The gap in the memory of the Holocaust survivor's descendants is believed to be filled directly with the experience of the Eastern European homeland of their family, and that is the main incentive of root tourism.

The lack of vocabulary and experience in discussing the topic of Holocaust postmemory is illustrated at a number of levels. So the speech of the depicted characters is ruptured, as well as the narrative of their experience. The descendants of Holocaust survivors experienced a specific difficulty facing this historical reality. This process was reflected in their literary works. That is why they are so full of games with reality, whether they are realized by fantastical elements or humorous modes of representation.

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